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THE COREAN ORIGIN OF JAPANESE ART

by

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*The Korean Origin of Japanese Art.*  
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## THE COREAN ORIGIN OF JAPANESE ART.

THE long-closed peninsula of Corea, after repeated efforts of France, Russia, England, Germany, and Italy to open it to foreign commerce, has yielded at last to American diplomacy, and has become a treaty-partner with the United States. After three distinct rebuffs, one as long ago as 1866, Commodore R. W. Shufeldt has won a diplomatic triumph that fitly crowns a long and brilliant professional career in the Navy of the United States. Though it is not probable that this treaty will be ratified in its present form, especially if it recognizes the suzerainty of China over Corea, yet friendship between the two countries is now assured. Commerce will soon bring "the hermit into the marketplace," and Corean bric-à-brac, which, although coarser than the Japanese, is fully as characteristic, will be less of a rarity in our shops. If China is the Egypt, and Japan the Greece of eastern Asia, then Corea is the Cyprus, supplying the middle term of development between the two phases of art. Corea is not merely the path by which Chinese art entered the Mikado's empire, but the land in which that art was modified and developed. Before considering this topic, let us glance for a moment at the recent history of this strange land.

The Japanese, by making a treaty in 1876, in which they recognized Cho-sen, as they properly call Corea, as an independent and sovereign nation, thereby abandoned a claim upon her as a vassal nation which they had held for over fifteen hundred years. Nor has the Mikado's government ever recognized China's claim of suzerainty over Corea,—a fact pregnant with mighty issues in the future of history on the Asian Pacific coast. Since 1878 the Japanese have had a legation in Seoul. The rival political parties in Corea, losing sight of old issues—chiefly dynastic and local questions—have re-arranged themselves as Progressionists ("Civilization party") and Conservatives ("Corea for the Coreans"); a second ground of division being in the pro-Chinese and pro-Japanese sympathies, according to the one or the other of which China or Japan serves as a model of national policy.

In 1864, the dynasty of Ni, founded in 1392, came to an end by the failure of direct heirs. The three widows of former sovereigns agreed upon the choice of a boy then but twelve years old, whose father Ni Kung was supposed to be inert and neutral in politics;

but no sooner was his son declared sovereign, and himself Tai-wen-Kun (Lord of the Great Court),—the title of a noble whose son is made king,—than he seized the reins of power, and ruled the country with "heart of stone and bowels of iron," as the Coreans say. Under his rule, the nine French bishops and priests who had lived in the country in disguise were beheaded; and in the frightful persecutions which followed, many thousand (some say one hundred and fifty thousand) natives were tortured or put to death, while thousands more fled into the Russian possessions. The burning of the American vessels *General Sherman* and the *China*, both suspected of being on piratical expeditions to rob the tombs of Corean kings, also took place under his regency. In 1873 the young king attained his majority, and took upon himself the active duties of the throne, his queen Min—a woman of great ability—urging friendship with Japan, and checkmating the power of the Regent. As a result of the constant agitation of the Progressionists, the influence of Li Hung Chang, the able Chinese liberal, and a spirited memorial from Kwo-in-ken, a Chinese publicist, who urged Corea to make a treaty with the Americans—the natural friends of Asiatic States—the young king, backed by his ministers Bin Kenko, Bin Hogen, Ri Saiwo, and others, sent word to Commodore Shufeldt, then in Tien-tsin, that all was ready for a treaty. Accordingly, Commodore Shufeldt appeared in the U. S. SS. *Swatara*, May 7, 1882, off In-chiun (Jap. Ninsen) the newly opened port in Imperatrice Gulf, twenty-five miles from the capital. On the 9th the treaty was signed, and shortly after similar treaties were concluded with China, Great Britain, France, and Germany.

The opening of a port so near the capital, and the signing of treaties with foreigners, stirred up the bigoted alien-haters and Confucianists to the highest pitch of rage. Inflammatory placards were posted on the palace gates, processions of men, dramatically robed in mourning and bearing remonstrances, paraded the streets of Seoul, and the erection of hundreds of monuments inscribed with ultra-patriotic sentiments went on daily. Unfortunately, no rain had fallen for some weeks after the treaties were signed, so that the wells dried up, and the rice-crop threatened total failure. While the garrison had no rice for rations, the Japanese in Seoul—



numbering forty persons—were well supplied. The leaders of the anti-foreign party, headed by the ex-regent, Tai-wen-Kun, stirred up the peasantry and turbulent soldiery to believe that the spirits were angry because foreigners

rise; must not even the Western foreigner do reverence?" The commercial spread of Japanese art during the last twenty years, and its consequent influence upon Western life, are familiar to the reader of contemporary



MEN OF SHINKA SUBMIT THEMSELVES TO QUEEN JINGU. (A. D. 202.)

had polluted the soil of the holy country (Corea). The consequences were seen in the murderous riot of July 23d, in which seven Japanese, the queen, the heir-apparent and his bride of two months, the superintendent of the rice-granaries, and three prominent ministers of the court, were killed by the rioters, who numbered four thousand. The subsequent events—the prompt and firm action of Japan, and the deposition of Tai-wen-Kun by China, are well known.

A new sunrise in decorative art has dawned upon us since "The House of the Morning" opened its doors to Commodore Perry in 1854. Those who crossed the threshold began at once to gather up the art treasures visible on every side; but the first systematic collection of art objects from Japan was made by Sir Rutherford Alcock, and was exhibited in Paris in 1862. Later on, in the exhibitions in London, Vienna, and Philadelphia, the Japanese erected a Gate Beautiful, through which delighted Westerners entered to fulfill a poet's prophecy, uttered a thousand years ago: "In our ancient island, Yamato [Japan], the sun

literature, for whose benefit a small library of books and essays on the subject have been written; but few know to what extent Japan was indebted for its art to its neighbor.

For Japanese art is not original. The full sunrise and mid-day of oriental art belongs, indeed, to the islands, but the fountains of its first light lay in the near peninsula, known for centuries to the Japanese as "The Treasure Land of the West." A thousand years before Perry sailed for the Tycoon's capital, the subjects of Haroun Al Raschid traded with the Koreans, bringing to Bagdad and Damascus pearls, gold, jeweled ornaments, saddles, porcelain, and drugs from Shinra (an ancient state in Corea); while in Nankin and the palaces of China the fame of the peninsular art was great. The Japanese themselves clearly distinguish the various elements in their art-products, according to their Chinese, Corean, or Buddhist origin, calling them respectively *Kara-we*, *Korai-we*, *Butsu-we*. The Persian influence, though distinctly traceable, is not named, or is classified with the India or Buddhist school.

For centuries after the introduction of



artists and models from the Corean peninsula to Japan, art was an exotic in Nara, the ancient capital. When, at last, it took root in Kioto, and began to flourish, the motives and models were Corean. Chinese art in Japan remains, to this day, distinct and apart. Corean art has been absorbed in the Japanese; yet, none the less does the credit belong to the Land of Morning Calm. The fountain and the rill have been lost in the river, yet the fountain was before the river.

"Long ere great Buddha strode  
Upon his calm, colossal, god-like way  
O'er the broad rolling rivers of Cathay,  
By the Korean road,

"And stepping stormy seas  
Hither, to mount the golden lotus throne  
Of Nara, there to rule and muse alone,  
Through lingering centuries."

Japan, while borrowing nearly everything that was worth borrowing from China, received it through a filter. Corea once willingly sifted her benefits on Arabs and Japanese alike; but when every mesh was frozen fast by the policy of almost polar seclusion, she went back to her old pupil to learn anew.

Yet it is not the degenerate Corea of to-day that supplied the ground-forms of the art now so admired by us, but the Shinra and Korai of the early and middle ages. In these, art came to the flower, only to be plucked and worn by the Japanese. The cynical critics of the Japanese legation in Seoul tell us that "art is in a very backward state in Corea,"—"that the finest pictures seen on the screens of the best rooms in Seoul might be purchased in Tokio for a *tempo* [penny] or so." As yet, however, these modern Anaks, despising the grasshopper Coreans, have not entered the king's palace, or the houses of the nobles. A study of the past achievement of Corean fingers in decorative art will show that, at the outset, the peninsula was the teacher, and the islands the pupil. The decay of Corean art was largely due to the fact that the Japanese drained the rival country of her best artists and workmen. The emigrations of Coreans to Japan, so often noticed in the annals of the latter country, resemble the scattering of the Huguenots in Europe. Of this, let us proceed to give historic proofs.

In the first place, the Japanese and Coreans are but as Americans and Englishmen, "cousins" in ethnology, language, and customs. They are branches of the one Fuyu race, whose ancestral seats were in Manchuria. Of the repeated swarming of new races away from the old hive in the Amoor

and Sungari valleys, this immigration alone turned to the eastward, all the others moving to the west. Peering through the gauze curtain of ancient Japanese legend, we see the first invaders from the peninsula sailing across the sea of Japan and landing on the islands which they named Nippon, or Rising Sun. Especially can we detect that Susanoo, a sort of celestial scamp who plays pranks or benefits mankind as the mood seizes him, was a genuine Corean, who planted the new country with seeds from the peninsula. The first visitors to the new settlers from the old country brought jewel-work and gems, and, about 200 A. D., the Amazonian widow of the Mikado, Jingu Kogo, invaded Shinra, put the land under tribute, and returned to Japan with eighty ships loaded with works of art and skill (see the illustration on page 225). These comprised pictures, brocades, precious stones, books, and various articles new to the warriors of Yamato. A century or two later followed teachers, artists, costumers, architects; and, in 552 A. D., Buddhist priests with images and sacred rolls, temple builders and decorators, bringing in a vast train of civilizing influences, arrived at the court of the Mikado and succeeded in intrenching themselves (see the illustration on page 227). What the Roman Catholic church is to Europe, Buddhism is to Asia. Shintoism is Puritan as to art,—austere and unsensuous; so also is Confucianism.

Not until the ninth century was there any native art in Japan; it was all Corean or Chinese. There was an Imperial School of Painting (*We-dokoro*) having four chief painters and sixty sketchers or draughtsmen, whose main business it was to decorate the palace and public buildings; but these were all Coreans. The office was subsequently incorporated with the Bureau of Architecture, the chief, or "painter-laureate," as he may be called, being, however, held in special honor. It was not until near the close of the ninth century that the first native artist of any prominence arose, in the person of Kanaoka, who painted natural objects, animals, and Chinese sages. Not until the eleventh century did a distinctively native school of art, treating subjects chosen at home, arise. This *nishiki-ye*, or "brocade-style," in which the details of costume were brilliantly depicted, was succeeded, two or three centuries later, by the Tosa style, in which broad masses of gold and many bright colors are used to portray court scenes and palace life. In the fifteenth century, along with the passion for Corean white porcelain, came the rage for those dark glazed bowls and cups which now bring absurdly large prices. The patronage





COREAN ENVOY PRESENTING AN IMAGE OF BUDDHA TO THE MIKADO. (A. D. 255.)

of the mighty Taiko (*Hideyoshi*) and the demand of the Kioto tea-clubs brought over the very best of the Corean artists in clay. It is, perhaps, no exaggeration to claim that one of the motives which helped to swell the war-cry of "On to Corea!" in 1592, was the desire of Taiko's generals to seize and bring over the entire ceramic art and industry of Corea bodily. It is a matter of record that when the war was over, in 1597, the daimios of Satsuma, Bizen, Higo, and Choshu, who had secured colonies of Corean potters and decorators, transported them to their respective provinces in Japan. From these immigrants grew up the schools of decorative and ceramic art, known under the name of Satsuma, Hizen, Imari, Arita, Bizen, Higo, and Choshu. Immense treasures of Corean art were also sent from the peninsula while the war was in progress, and previous to it the Kioto schools of pottery and decoration were of Corean origin. Other excellent specimens of Corean art in Japan in painting, ceramics, bronze, and architecture, may be found in the temples and museums at Nara, Kamakura, and other places, and the tombs of Nikko and Tokio. Among the objects brought by the tribute-bearers from the vassal country to the court of the Tycoon in Yedo during the seventeenth century were bronzes cast in the characteristic wave-pattern. Of the many colonies of Corean artificers located

in Japan, from the fifth to the fifteenth centuries, nearly all have effectually mingled their blood and speech with the Japanese. Those who settled in Satsuma have not entirely lost their original lineage and tongue. Except in painting and lacquer, most of the really artistic products of Japan date from the fifteenth century, or even later,—in other words, after Japan had exhausted Corea. It is rare indeed to see a famous seat of high art industry not founded by Coreans.

In an exposition of the various forms of the decorative art of Nippon, even the tyro soon discovers a few patterns constantly repeated. In reality, these are mostly, if not entirely, borrowed or improved Corean. Let us note a few of them.

The "wave-pattern," seen on coins, bronzes, brocades, carvings, and color-decoration, is perhaps the most characteristic. It interprets the Corean phrase which is nearly equal in poetic beauty to Sophocles' ἀνάρηθμον γέλασμα, "unnumbered laughings,—ten thousand flashings of blue waves." It has been largely copied, with variations, by Western designers, and may be seen on the Corean water-pot in Jacquemart's collection. The Japanese have added the stormy petrel and the tortoises of longevity. The fallen autumnal leaf floating on the running stream, or the half-submerged flower borne on the current from home to the sea, is also a Corean sentiment expressed in art, which.



the Japanese have borrowed and abundantly expanded with excellent effect. The graceful curve and dash of sea-waves imitated on the handles of tea-pots, and in such positions as serve to display the full form untrammelled, is also a Corean, not a Japanese, invention. So also is the tall and graceful long-lipped tea-pot. The orthodox Japanese utensil is chubby and round. Many of the exquisite

or, perhaps, as it may be called, the conventionalized chrysanthemum design, is also distinctively Corean. The successive layers of the narrow-petaled autumn flower which is the imperial favorite in Japan, may have suggested the decorative form actually used, though we think the idea was caught from those deft arrangements in bamboo threads, which in the two countries are made to simu-



HERBERT FILMER. Sc.

COREAN TRIBUTE-BEARER BEFORE THE TYCOON, YEDO. (SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.)

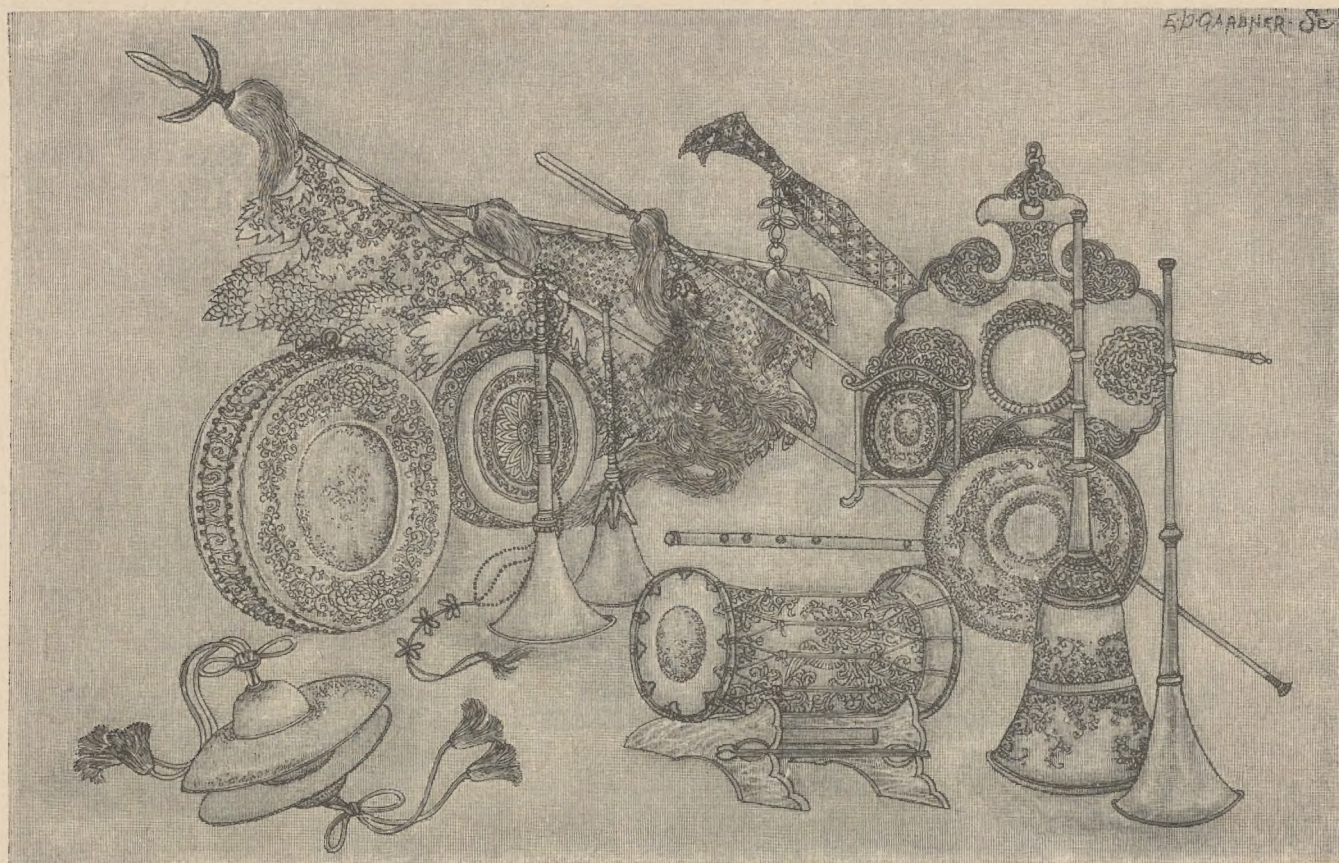
shapes of grace and beauty usually ascribed to the cunning eye and hand of potters in the Mikado's domain had many an ancestor in the peninsula, whence came the first potter's wheel and much of that ancient blue ware which is still called "Corean faience."

The "arabesque" lines of decoration that break up the total surface of decoration by flat fillets, or curved flutings, are purely Corean. These may be seen in the typical water-pot of Jacquemart. Under handle and spout, and along the sides run these vertical strips of decoration. Fruit, flowers, but especially the peony, are tastefully wrought into so-called arabesque forms, the Corean term for which is *chui-piong*. It is seen in richest luxuriance upon fans, curtains, musical instruments, and as embroidery upon garments. The peony blossoms liberally in all works of art from the peninsula, and with wondrous variation and adaptation is effectively used in center-pieces, as rosettes, and wherever richness of mass is desired. The plaited split-bamboo pattern,

late floral designs. A specimen may be seen on the obverse of a drum, under the flags in the illustration on page 229.

We incline even to the belief that the landscape school of the gold-lacquer artists, porcelain and silk painters of Japan, were but docile pupils of Corean masters. The student of the gilded pictures of wave, sky, cloud, field, and house, seen on box and tray, *inro* and scroll, cannot but admire the rich effect, however he may criticise from an alien, or even from a scientific, point of view. Yet the lacquering and painting of landscapes is comparatively modern in Japan. Pieces may indeed be found containing flowers and religious subjects which date back even to the tenth century; but the "mountain, sky, and water" pictures, and what we call "landscape" paintings do not, on porcelain, antedate the end of the sixteenth, or lacquer the fifteenth, and on silk, wood, or paper, the twelfth century, while in Corean, the landscape in decoration is far older. Indeed, the whole drift of Japan-





MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND FLAGS USED IN THE ROYAL PROCESSION.

ese art traditions carries us back to Corea, or to Corean artists in Japan.

In this paper, we do not need to dwell upon the subjects chosen in common by the painters of Chinese Asia,—the four divinely constituted beasts: dragon, phoenix, tortoise, and *kirin*; though in the treatment of these favorites one soon learns to distinguish the nationality and the mannerism or genius of the masters. These four ideal creatures, and the sacred jewel-crystal or pearl, the swastika (卐), the “Greek key,” and many other forms and tricks of art, are not specially characteristic of any nation borrowing from China.

A supreme love of nature and delicate sensitiveness to her varying moods were the possession of the Corean long before these emotions were familiar to Japanese artists. In the Land of Morning Calm (as the people of the little kingdom love to call their country), the artists had learned to transmute their thoughts into form and color centuries before those who lived nearer the sun-rising. Much of the supposed “love of nature” and “faith-

fulness to nature” exhibited by the Japanese artist is, in actual fact and plain prose, nothing more than technical skill learned by rote from traditional models. Translate the rhapsody of Mr. Jarves to a native artist in Tokio, and the result would be open-eyed wonder, and a volley of honestly spoken *e, e, e*, (no! no! no!) Yet we do not forget that our author professes only a glimpse!

Art in Corea of to-day is indeed at a low ebb. By shutting out all the world, the hermit nation has lost her cunning. The prized white ware sometimes seen in collections dates from before the Japanese invasion of 1592. The so-called cheap “celadon” ware figuring as “Corean” in catalogues of sale, simply illustrates the elastic ideas of geography possessed by auctioneers. Judging, however, from the number of art terms in the Corean language, and arguing from the recent history of Japan, we think it not impossible that the last of the hermit nations may hold for the art-world one of the surprises of the future.

*William Elliot Griffis.*



COREAN WAVE PATTERN.











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